

WANDERERS BLASTED BY 2-GOAL KIDD

SUTTON United's attacking spearhead of Ricky Kidd and Graham Dennis inflicted Wycombe Wanderers' heaviest defeat of the season in the Rothmans Isthmian League on Saturday. Not only that, the 3-1 reverse now means the Blues have a mountainous task ahead of them if they are to retain the championship.

It was the two forward lines that proved the main difference between these two attacking sides. Whereas Wanderers struggled to make any prolonged impression up front, Sutton always looked dangerous coming forward and their pace

By STUART EARP

troubled every one of the back four.

It is a long time since Wycombe's defence has looked so unsure and susceptible to speed. But when you look at the facts, their dilemma on Saturday was hardly surprising. Kidd and Dennis have a total of 52 goals between them this season and the Sutton side as a whole are second-top goalscorers in Division One.

Dennis, tall, rangy and skilful, makes an ideal foil for Kidd, whose talents have attracted Millwall this season. Kidd got two goals this time, both laid on by Dennis, while giant centre half Mick Preston broke the ice with the first.

Sutton United 3, Wycombe Wanderers 1

I think it's fair to say that the conditions suited Sutton down to the ground. A howling wind blew from one end of the pitch to the other while the bone hard surface saw the ball bounce unpredictably. This gave defenders precious little time to clear any danger and although both John Delaney and Keith Mead did well in the air, their lack of pace was exposed on occasions.

Wanderers deserve credit for hauling themselves back from two goals down and with a shade more luck, they might have had another goal. But there's no denying Sutton's success for they were the better side on the day — especially up front.

Wycombe made several changes for this difficult game. Back came Delaney after injury while Howard Kennedy replaced Graham Mackenzie in midfield and Bruce Macrae came in for Geoff Anthony, who is suffering from an ulcerated throat. Dave Alexander was sub.

This was a rare league outing for young Macrae but he rose to the challenge well. Considering he was up against one of the best centre halves in non-league football, he showed a good deal of courage. Unfortunately he received very little support from his fellow front runners and although the midfield men worked hard, they were unable to provide a consistent service. This, of course, meant more work for the defence.

With the wind at their backs in the first half, Wycombe began well and forced two quick cor-

ners. From the first goalkeeper Rick Collier saved well and Mead headed the other fractionally wide.

John Maskell, whose handling was shaky throughout the game, soon began to put pressure on the home defence with some siege gun kicks downfield that reached the penalty area on the first bounce. Macrae met several of them well but no one was really able to control the ball.

It was against the run of play that United went ahead after 15 minutes. They won a corner after a quick free kick and up came Preston for the set piece. He took up position at the far post with Evans coming back to mark him, but Dylan was nowhere when McDonald's corner curled into the box and Preston headed firmly into the net.

Sutton did not take such risks at the other end. Whenever Delaney went forward for a set piece move, Preston was always shadowing him and allowed the Wycombe man only one clear header at goal. Sutton manager Ted Powell, who played several seasons with Delaney at Wycombe, knew the danger only too well.

Maskell was in trouble a couple of minutes after the first goal when Kidd crossed hard and low into the box but Wycombe's defence bundled the ball away. Sutton, however, now had the bit firmly between their teeth and always seemed to have a man spare when building down the flanks.

Wanderers managed to weather this spell of pressure thanks to some fine work by Mead, who had his best game for several weeks. At the other end, however, Collier was rarely troubled as Wycombe struggled to string passes together. Whenever they did, Preston was on hand to clear any danger. I was disappointed that Wanderers did not try more efforts from long range. Kennedy, who was lethal from outside the box last term, hardly had a shot all afternoon. With this strong wind behind them, a few attempts from midfield might have troubled the home 'keeper.

Although Kidd, Dennis and former Wycombe favourite Larry Pritchard were often caught by Wanderers' off-side trap, there was the odd occasion when they were infiltrating the visitors' defence and after two dangerous breaks, Sutton went further ahead with a fine goal. From Barry Steer's throw-in, Dennis got behind the defence and despite being marked by two men, sent over a cross from the bye-line. Kidd raced in at the far post and gave Maskell no chance with a bullet header into the corner.

It was at this stage that Wycombe showed great character. Instead of the heads going down, they raised their work rate and hit back to 2-1 within three minutes. Tony Horseman floated over a free kick to the far post where Collier could only palm the ball out to Mead. He headed through and saw Gary Cross clear off the line. Mead repeated the dose and this time Cross handled the ball as it went underneath the crossbar. Cross was promptly booked by referee Downey (United's second caution this season) and then Horseman slotted home the penalty sending Collier the wrong way.

Wanderers sensed this was the time to strike. Playing their best football of the match they began to build some dangerous attacks on the flanks and in the 67th minute, Horseman and Evans ran through the defence but were beaten by an unkindly bounce after Collier had blocked one shot.

A superb move almost brought an equaliser when Paul Birdseye sent a fine crossfield ball to Evans who trapped the ball, beat a defender but then sent his shot inches wide.

The pressure was all too brief, however, and Sutton sewed up the three points with their third goal in the 74th minute. Wanderers were caught napping by Cross's quick free kick which Delaney was unable to cut out as it flew over his outstretched boot. Dennis ran through into the box and fired in a shot which Maskell blocked. But the ball ran right into the path of Kidd and the rest was a formality.

Three minutes later Kidd missed his hat-trick by centimetres when he ran beautifully to meet a free kick from Preston. Given a free header by Wycombe's off-form defence, he saw the ball float over Maskell but clip the crossbar.

Alexander replaced Evans with 10 minutes remaining and almost immediately laid on a chance for Hollifield but Cross was there to clear.

To emphasise the fact that this just wasn't Wycombe's day, they almost conceded another goal in injury time. Birdseye, of all people, sent a suicidal ball across his own penalty area and Pritchard headed the free gift inches past the upright.

This was only Sutton's seventh victory in 26 games against Wanderers and their first for seven years. They have waited patiently for this triumph and no one can say they didn't deserve it on Saturday. As for Wycombe, they gave their everything and cannot be criticised for lack of effort. But on the day, they were second best.

SUTTON: R. Collier; G. Cross, J. Rains, M. Preston, K. Grose; M. Sorensen, B. Steer, S. McDonald; L. Pritchard, R. Kidd, G. Dennis. Sub. M. Bailey (not used).

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, K. Mead, J. Delaney, R. Eaton; H. Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Hollifield; A. Horseman, B. Macrae, D. Evans (sub. D. Alexander 80 mins).

Referee: C. Downey.

Goalscorers: Sutton — Kidd 2 (60, 74), Preston (15). Wycombe — Horseman pen. (63).

SATURDAY'S FIXTURES

K.O. 3 p.m.

Rothmans Isthmian League Division One: Wycombe Wanderers v Hitchin Town.

Athenian League Division One: Grays Athletic v Marlow.

London Spartan League Division Two: Bexley v Chalfont St. Peter, Amersham Town v Whyteleaf.

Rothmans Hellenic League Premier Division: Forest Green Rovers v Burnham.